



CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

2418 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976
213-651-1040

CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
by HENRY A. WAXMAN
(D-Los Angeles)

November 15, 1983

"THE FUTURE OF THE P.L.O."

As I write, Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat is fighting for both his political life and his physical survival. Bizarre as it may seem, his Arab brethren in the rejectionist camp have judged him too moderate. The Soviet Union appears to have made no political judgment of Arafat at all. Rather, the Russians appear to be reluctant to give up someone in whom they have made so large an investment.

In Israel, and in American Jewish circles, there is a widespread feeling that Arafat's disappearance or diminished strength would help Israel. I believe this sentiment is based in large measure on a gross exaggeration of Arafat's personal qualities and talents.

In reflecting on Arafat's value to the "Palestinian cause", I tried to control my own deep personal bias against a man who has caused so much innocent blood to be shed. I came to the conclusion that Arafat's success as a "leader" was due to factors completely separate from his abilities as either a soldier or politician.

First, I must hold America responsible for allowing Arafat's power to increase as a result of ambiguous U.S. policies. Both President Carter and President Reagan have sent the wrong signals regarding America's attitude towards the P.L.O. Carter erred by allowing "unofficial" high-level talks with P.L.O. representatives. The Reagan Plan included an ill-conceived Palestinian "homeland" under Jordanian sponsorship. These moves strengthened Arafat.

Arafat's principal backers--paradoxical though it may seem--were the "Western-oriented" Saudi Arabians and the Soviet Union. From these and other sources, Arafat received the arms and money which allowed him to dominate other Palestinian groups. The Soviets used Arafat as an agent for their Middle East ambitions. The Saudis paid Arafat off to make certain that revolutionary enthusiasm was not transferred to their own back yard.

The Western European nations had no more sincere liking for Arafat than the Saudis or Soviets. For them it was a case of appeasing any and every voice in the Arab world which they feared might speak against them on the central issue of oil. There was the added incentive--also rooted in cowardice--to try to appease Arafat so that P.L.O. terror would not strike on Western European soil.

.....MORE.....MORE.....MORE.....

In the World Council of Churches and other centers of Western "liberalism", some sincere people allowed their sentimentality to cloud their vision. They looked at Arafat, heavily armed and in military garb, and saw not a ruthless terrorist, but a symbol of a homeless and oppressed people. Their attachment was not to the personality of Arafat, but to a perverse interpretation of recent Middle East history. They saw three million Israelis as conquerors and oppressors of 70-million Arabs.

It is my deepest fear that Syrian-backed P.L.O. Colonel Abu Moussa, despite his extremism, may well inherit the advantages Arafat enjoyed. I am not nearly as optimistic as others among Israel's friends that those who embraced Yasser Arafat will reject Abu Moussa. After all, the cynical motives which brought so much of the world to crown Arafat as the king of the new Palestinian state, may very well operate to bring Moussa or any other P.L.O. leadership the same international status and accrued benefits.

###